



U.S. Department of Justice

United States Attorney
Northern District of Texas

1100 Commerce St., 3rd Fl.
Dallas, Texas 75242-1699

Telephone (214)659-8600
Fax (214)767-2898

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: 214/659-8707
www.usdoj.gov/usao/txn

DALLAS, TEXAS
DECEMBER 20, 2004

Wheelchair Supply Business Owners Charged in Health Care Fraud Conspiracy

Scheme Involved More Than \$27 Million in Fraudulent Billings to Medicare

United States Attorney Richard B. Roper announced today that a federal grand jury in Dallas returned a 43-count superseding indictment against three durable medical equipment (wheelchair supply) business owners, charging them with conspiracy to commit health care fraud and money laundering, health care fraud, money laundering and forfeiture allegations. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, more than \$27 million in false Medicare billings can be attributed to these defendants.

Charged in the indictment are: Aniekeme B. Akpabot, the owner of Mina Medical Equipment and Supplies in Mesquite, Texas; Okon Eyo Idiong, owner of OK Medical Equipment and Supplies and OK Medical Equipment and Supplies, L.L.C, Southfield, Michigan; and Aniefiok Jimmy Eking, owner of Medical Equipment and Supplies and Mescorp Pharmaceuticals, in Houston, Texas. All of the durable medical equipment businesses were assumed named businesses of their sole proprietors and exclusive owners, the three named defendants.

Defendant Akpabot was originally charged in an indictment in February 2004 as part of an investigative operation called "Operation Roll Over." This week's indictment adds defendants Idiong and Eking as well as numerous counts, including the conspiracy and money laundering charge. These three defendants are the main players in a fraud scheme that spread across the southern and southwestern United States. Defendant Eking has also been indicted in the Southern District of Texas on related charges.

Defendants Akpabot and Eking are fugitives. Defendant Okon Eyo Idiong was arrested in Detroit, Michigan, and is presently in custody in the Northern District of Texas

where he will be prosecuted. If convicted on all charges, defendant Akpabot faces a statutory maximum sentence of 255 years; defendant Idiong, 245 years; and defendant Eking, 175 years. Each faces millions in fines and restitution. In total, nine vehicles, including several luxury vehicles, and \$22 million in proceeds the defendants acquired in the fraud will be forfeited upon conviction.

According to the indictment, beginning in July 2002, and continuing to approximately August 26, 2003, Akpabot, Idiong and Eking conspired with each other, and others, to defraud the Medicare program in connection with the delivery of and payment for wheelchairs and accessories and to commit money laundering with the fraudulently obtained proceeds.

The conspiracy involved the defendants soliciting Medicare patients in several ways and obtaining Certificates of Medical Necessity and prescriptions for wheelchairs from various physicians who were willing participants in the conspiracy. The defendants paid the recruiters for locating Medicare patients and coordinating physical evaluations and also paid the physicians for obtaining the fraudulent Certificates of Medical Necessity and the power wheelchair prescriptions. The defendants would bill Medicare for the top-of-the-line K0011 power wheelchair, but either never delivered any wheelchair at all to the Medicare patients, or delivered a far less expensive scooter to the Medicare patients. Typically Medicare was billed from \$8000 - \$10,000 for the motorized wheelchairs. For each claim they submitted, the wheelchair suppliers would receive approximately \$5000 from Medicare.

U.S. Attorney Roper especially recognized the investigative efforts and teamwork of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations. In addition, he praised the investigative efforts of the Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation; the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; the Federal Bureau of Investigation; and the Department of Homeland Security, Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

An indictment is an accusation by a federal grand jury and a defendant is entitled to the presumption of innocence unless proven guilty. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys William C. McMurrey and John DeLaGarza and Special Assistant United States Attorney Kimberly Priest.